

# Writing Learning Outcomes - S. M. A. R. T. Approach

Last Modified on 04/15/2020 5:44 pm EDT

Because you are focusing on student performance and bearing in mind what you'd like your students to do and how they should be able to demonstrate their new knowledge, skills, and abilities, your outcomes need to be written with the plan of action in mind. So, as you go through the process of determining what the learning outcomes should be for your course, jot them down. You may come up with a long list, but later, make sure that you select the ones that best reflect what you'd like your students to achieve. We'd like to follow best practices for instructional design, so we recommend that your final list should contain not more than six or seven outcomes.

Note:

You can learn more about best practices for developing learning and performance outcomes in the classic work *The Systematic Design of Instruction* by Walter Dick and Lou Cary in 1978. Their work was so influential that it came to be known as the Dick and Carey Systems Approach Model and was widely adopted by instructional designers and training developers.

To transform your informal list of desired outcomes to formal learning outcomes statements, you may benefit from using the S. M.A. R. T. approach, which was first developed by George T. Doran in the November, 1981 issue of *Management Review*. Since it was first published, it has become very popular in many applications that need to measure goals and outcomes. The criteria are very handy for making sure that your statements are complete. Here are the S. M. A. R. T. guidelines, where your outcomes should be as follows:

- Specific: Make sure that the desired outcomes are not too broad
- Measurable: Include a quantity or a way to measure progress
- Attainable: Your desired outcomes need to be achievable
- Relevant: Make sure that the desired outcomes relate to your course
- Time bound: Make it clear by when the objective should be achieved

As you write your S. M.A. R. T. outcomes, be sure to avoid verbs or phrases such as "understand", "appreciate", "know about", "familiarize yourself with", and "develop an awareness of". Instead, use active verbs and phrases that connote measurable results, such as "identify", "describe", "analyze", "evaluate", and "create". Look back at the guidelines, and you'll see that they may not be measurable and may also have other deficiencies.

